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WASHINGTON POST
11 March 1981

Reagan to Ease Curb On Domestic Spying, CIA Official Confirms

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The Central Intelligence Agency's deputy director confirmed yesterday that some of the restrictions imposed on spying and counterespionage in the United States will be lifted in a new executive order by President Reagan later this year.

Speaking out at a rare on-the-record briefing at CIA headquarters, Adm. Bobby Ray Inman maintained that the scope of the changes had been vastly exaggerated in publicity about a set of preliminary proposals.

A draft of a proposed executive order, obtained by The Washington Post, would give the CIA authority to conduct covert operations in this country and to resume other "intrusive" practices, such as surreptitious entry, that were put off-limits following the disclosure of abuses in the mid-1970s.

Inman predicted that the final executive order would contain nothing that would give the agency power to carry out covert operations in the United States.

"To the best of my knowledge," he said, "there is no intent to proceed anywhere down that line." He said suggestions in news stories Tuesday morning were simply a first-blush recitation of ideas on how to deal more effectively with terrorism and foreign espionage in this country.

Inman said he is confident that political realities and concern for the rule of law would squelch many of the initial suggestions in the lengthy discussions that must be held before Reagan issues a new order.

"I think we clearly will have a revised executive order," Inman said. But he did not think it would be promulgated until late spring or early summer.

Clearly annoyed by Tuesday's leaks, Inman said he has no doubt that "all kinds of ideas" had been committed to paper, but he declared repeatedly that all such work was done in response to an explicit request from the White House in late January.

"The new administration has read a great deal in the years out of office about the state of U.S. intelligence and, particularly, questions about our current abilities in regard to dealing with terrorism and the whole area of counterintelligence," Inman told reporters. "Once they took office, they wanted to know what was the status of our capabilities on the questions of terrorism."

That, in turn, led to a White House request that all of the intelligence agencies make "an assessment of the impact of current restrictions" and what they thought might be achieved "if you did not have these restrictions," he said.

The results thus far, collected by a working group headed by CIA general counsel Daniel B. Silver, are far from the final product, Inman declared. He said he felt that Tuesday's initial news stories constituted "a bum rap" insofar as they implied that either he or CIA Director William J. Casey is actively seeking such changes.

Throughout the session, Inman sought to avoid direct discussion of preliminary suggestions committed to paper. Silver had declared earlier that nothing one could properly label a draft executive order even existed.

A copy of a typewritten, 16-page "Executive Order" — outlining far-reaching changes, at least on paper, from rules laid down by President Carter — was obtained later in the day.

That order would, as informed sources said Monday, eliminate the Carter administration standard of using the "least intrusive means possible" to collect intelligence information and sharply restrict the attorney general's veto power over controversial techniques, such as opening mail

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CIA officials would neither confirm nor deny the authenticity of the 16-page document. CIA spokesman LaVon Strong said that in any case, it "doesn't negate what Inman is saying."

"The way you start commenting on those [existing] restrictions is you get out the old executive order and start rejiggering it," Strong said. "But there's a lot of people who are going to take potshots" at any proposed order before it can be adopted.

One complaint came immediately from the American Civil Liberties Union, whose spokesman, Jerry Ber- man, said the draft "sounds like a very serious alteration of their [the CIA's] authority and would place civil liberties in jeopardy."

On Capitol Hill, Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) said his Senate Intelligence Committee had asked for and received from the CIA last week "draft proposed revisions to the executive order" Carter issued in 1978.

"A study of the proposals is under way with a view toward future discussions with the executive branch," Goldwater said in a brief statement. He said the CIA would brief the Senate committee at an executive session Friday.

For his part, Inman said he did not regard the CIA's getting into the business of surreptitious searches and break-ins as "a likely outcome." He refused to speculate, however, on what changes were in store.

"I don't have a clue at this point [as to] what it's going to look like," he said. "And I don't think the public interest is served by the presumption that there are decisions or changes" on the verge of being made.

Inman said, however, that he regards the threat of terrorism as very real. He suggested that changes in the executive order are needed "because of the changing world we're dealing with."